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AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) An orienter device for orienting a container in a desired rotational position prior to placement in a container carrier, the orienter device comprising:

a reader for reading a rotational position of the container and determining an initial orientation of the container;

a control system for obtaining the initial orientation of the container from the reader and determining a shortest rotational distance from the initial orientation to the desired rotational position between a clockwise direction and a counterclockwise direction; and

a chuck engaged with the container and in communication with the control system, the orienter device effective to rotate [for rotating] the container the shortest rotational distance to the desired rotational position.

2. (Original) The orienter device of Claim 1 wherein the control system calculates a distance between the initial orientation of the container and the desired rotational position of the container and provides a signal to the chuck to move the container to reach the desired rotational position in the shortest rotational distance.

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3. (Original) The orienter device of Claim 1 further comprising a plurality of chucks arranged in a wheel.

4. (Original) The orienter device of Claim 1 further comprising: a star wheel having a plurality of pockets, each pocket of the plurality of pockets accommodating a container, the star wheel maintaining the desired rotational position of the container from the chuck to the container carrier.

5. (Original) The orienter device of Claim 1 further comprising: a resilient insert positioned in each pocket of the plurality of pockets.

6. (Original) The orienter device of Claim 1 further comprising: a bi-directional motor connecting the chuck to the control system.

7. (Original) The orienter device of Claim 1 wherein the reader comprises:
a digital camera to capture an image of the container.

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8. (Currently Amended) A system for packaging oriented containers in a container carrier, the system receiving a plurality of unoriented containers at an inlet, the system comprising:

a digital reader, the digital reader determining an initial orientation of an unoriented container of the plurality of unoriented containers;

an orienter wheel connected with respect to the inlet and in communication with the digital reader, the orienter wheel including a rotatable chuck, the rotatable chuck receiving a signal from the digital reader and rotating the unoriented container in a shortest rotational distance from the initial orientation into an oriented position having a desired rotational position; and

a packaging machine for placing a container carrier around a plurality of oriented containers.

9. (Original) The system of Claim 8 further comprising:

a star wheel positioned directly adjacent to the orienter wheel, the star wheel having a plurality of pockets for transferring the oriented containers to the container carrier.

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10. (Original) The system of Claim 9 wherein each pocket of the plurality of pockets includes an insert for maintaining the oriented position of the oriented container.

11. (Original) The system of Claim 9 further comprising:
a rail positioned around a perimeter of the star wheel, the rail having a smooth surface to permit the oriented containers to slide along the rail.

12. (Currently Amended) The system of Claim 8 further comprising:

a control system, the control system receiving the initial orientation from the digital reader and calculating a distance between the initial orientation of the unoriented container and the desired rotational position of the oriented container and providing a signal to the rotatable chuck within the orienter wheel to move the container counterclockwise or clockwise to reach the desired rotational position in the shortest rotational distance.

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13. (Currently Amended) A method of packaging a plurality of containers in a container carrier comprising:

feeding a container of the plurality of containers into an orienter wheel having at least one chuck;

engaging the container with the chuck;

sensing an image of an initial rotational position of the container;

determining a shortest rotational distance from the initial rotational position of the container to an oriented position of the container;

rotating the container with the chuck in a shortest rotational distance from the initial rotational position of the container to [an] the oriented position of the container;

fixing the container into the oriented position; and

applying the container carrier over two or more oriented containers.

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14. (Original) The method of Claim 13 further comprising:
comparing the initial position of the container with a desired rotational position of the container; and

calculating the shortest rotational distance between rotating the container in a clockwise direction and a counterclockwise direction based upon the difference between the initial position and the desired rotational position of the container.

15. (Currently Amended) The method of Claim 13 further comprising:

transferring an oriented container in a fixed rotational position from the orienter wheel to [the] a packaging machine.

16. (Currently Amended) The method of Claim 13 further comprising:

transferring an oriented container in a fixed rotational position from the orienter wheel to a star wheel; and

transferring the oriented container in the fixed rotational position from the star wheel to [the] a packaging machine.

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17. (Original) The method of Claim 13 further comprising:
rotating the container less than 180°.

18. (Original) The method of Claim 13 further comprising:
moving at least a portion of the container into flush contact with the
chuck.

19. (Currently Amended) A method of orienting a container
comprising:
feeding a container into an orienter device;
fixing the container into a rotatable chuck;
sensing an initial position of the container from an image of the
container;
determining a shortest rotational distance from the initial position of the
container to an oriented position of the container; and
rotating the rotatable chuck and the container clockwise or
counterclockwise into the oriented position of the container around the shortest
rotational distance.

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20. (Original) The method of Claim 19 further comprising:
rotating the container less than 180°.